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Haig's Emissary, in Guatemala, Discounts Charges of Rights Abuse

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GUATEMALA CITY, May 13 — Retired general Vernon Walters, special emissary of Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., today dismissed most criticism of the human rights situation here.

In terms similar to those used by the Guatemalan government, he said the United States hopes to help that government defend "peace and liberty" and "the constitutional institutions of this country against the ideologies that want to finish off those institutions."

Walters would not say whether such support would include the renewal of U.S. military aid to Guatemala, but his statements were clearly inclined toward that possibility.

Articulating what appears to be the developing policy of the Reagan administration toward Latin America, Walters said, "It is not difficult to see which countries are our friends and which are not."

Walters repeated the position of President Reagan that Washington will "stay by the side of our allies and there will be no more Iran... our purpose is to balance once again the military situation with respect to the Soviet Union and to do this we must strengthen our allies." He met with President Romeo Lucas Garcia and other top officials of the military-dominated government in his two-day visit here.

Guatemala faces a growing leftist insurgency led by an estimated 2,000 guerrillas. As Walters noted, this country has been plagued by bloody political violence for almost 20 years. Human rights groups including Amnesty International have accused the conservative regimes here of engaging in or tacitly approving the activities of right-wing terrorists.

Amnesty has charged that last year "some 3,000 people described by government representatives as 'subversives' and 'criminals' were either shot on the spot in political assassinations or seized and murdered later." The rights group rebutted official contentions that such activity was carried out by "independent" paramilitary groups rather than by security forces.

Guatemala has rejected U.S. military assistance since 1977 because it was conditioned on an improving human rights record.

Walters, speaking in fluent Spanish at a press conference this morning, said that in his opinion "there will be human rights problems in the year 3000 with the governments of Mars and the moon. There are some problems that are never resolved. One has to find a solution that respects a being's right to live without fear. But as I see it, the best way to do that is not to impose the ideas of one nation on top of another."

[Vinicio Cerezo, leader of Guatemala's Christian Democratic Party, commented in an interview in Washington that he thought the Guatemalan government, with the encouragement of the Reagan administration, could do something to stop the rights violations.

[Cerezo, who survived an assassination attempt in February, said 76 leaders of his party have been killed by rightist death squads in the past nine months. He said he was seeing U.S. officials this week to seek their support for a political, rather than a military solution to the violence there. If Washington provides any aid there should be conditions requiring that human rights be respected, he added.]

Walters, a former deputy director of the CIA, said it is "essential" that the government here "earn the confidence

of the people and get rid of the guerrillas, who are against liberty." He also said, "You have to answer military attacks militarily."

Since 1977, Guatemala has obtained arms from Israel, Argentina and other nations, but its nine U.S.-supplied helicopters, which are vital to counterinsurgency warfare, are reported to be in need of parts.

Walters would not comment on the possibility that those parts would be made available, but local newspapers reported this morning that an understanding has been reached which could result in their shipment.

Walters visited Guatemala as part of a trip that took him to Honduras this afternoon and is to end in Panama later this week. He said its purpose was consultation with the governments to inform them of the Reagan administration's thinking and help define policy toward this area.

Walters' statements suggest a radical change from the attitudes of the Carter administration, which viewed several Latin American governments as so repressive that they were inherently unstable and could not be supported.

Ambassador Frank Ortiz, who was removed from his post here last year because his superiors in the Carter administration felt him too conciliatory toward the Guatemalan regime, is accompanying Walters on his trip.

The Carter administration emphasized political solutions to the revolutionary turmoil in this area. Walters said he would also hope for a political way out of war, but "we do not want a political solution like that of Vietnam," alluding to the authoritarian communist regime now in power there and its policies that have driven hundreds of thousands of people to flee the country.